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AUTHOR	Acton, William; Cope, Corrine.
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ABSTRACT

In learning a second language, an important threshold has been crossed when authentic, extended communication with native speakers becomes possible. At that point, the learner is able to take a proactive role in interactions, gaining at least some real control over the topic, course, and purpose of a conversation. Training in attending skills set in a cooperative learning group can help English as a Second Language (ESL) students get to that level quickly and effectively. The cooperative learning model has provided a flexible and principled basis for group teaching and learning. This chapter outlines a Cooperative Attending Skills Training (CAST) process for ESL students based on Acton and other ESL-oriented cooperative models. A key feature of this cooperative learning adaptation of attending skills training was inspired by the frustration of trying to teach English conversation skills to Japanese college freshman. Through careful attention to topic selection, a cooperatively based balancing role, and responsibility within conversation groups, this CAST framework adds considerably to the applicability of attending skills training. In its present form, the CAST system can be used in virtually any second language learning program. An appendix with a model cooperative attending skills training curriculum is included. (Contains 22 references.) (KFT)

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Chapter 4

ED 437 843

Cooperative Attending Skills Training for ESL Students

William Acton
Nagoya University of Commerce

Corrine Cope
University of Missouri-Columbia

In learning a second language an important threshold has been crossed when authentic, extended communication with native speakers becomes possible. At that point, the learner is able to take a proactive role in interactions, gaining at least some real control over the topic, course, and purpose of a conversation. Training in attending skills (Ivey, Normington, Miller, Morril, & Hasse, 1968), set in a cooperative learning group process (Slavin, 1983), can help ESL students get to that level quickly and effectively.

The cooperative learning model has provided a flexible and principled basis for group teaching and learning (Johnson, 1989; Johnson & Holubec, 1991; Kagan, 1993; Slavin, 1983). This chapter outlines a Cooperative Attending Skills Training (CAST) process for ESL students based on Acton (1984) and other ESL-oriented cooperative models (Acton & Cope, 1978, 1980, 1983; High, 1993; Nunan, 1992; McGuire, 1992). A key feature of this cooperative learning adaptation of attending skills training was inspired by the frustration of trying to teach English conversation skills to Japanese college freshmen.

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The model in Acton (1984) was effective with international students and foreign professionals in the United States. When it was first tried with Japanese college freshmen in Japan, it simply did not work. For starters, it seemed almost impossible to get those students to consistently come up with topics worth attending to, that is, topics that were inherently interesting for them to talk about and listen to—a sine qua non of attending skills work. As compared with international students in the U.S., for example, these Japanese students' lives and experiences prior to coming to college appeared incredibly uniform: same tastes, same high school clubs, same hobbies. They had not traveled much; most of them had time for little more than studying and their part-time jobs. There seemed to be almost nothing new for them to talk about.

Through careful attention to topic selection, however, and a cooperatively based balancing of role and responsibility within conversation groups, this CAST framework adds considerably to the applicability of attending skills training. In its present form, the CAST system can be used in virtually any second language learning program.

Microtraining and Attending Skills

In the mid-1960s Ivey and associates in counseling psychology (e.g., Ivey et al., 1968; Ivey & Authier, 1978) developed an approach to counselor training that included "attending skills," the process of keeping an interview or intimate conversation going. To paraphrase Ivey, good attending is basically keeping someone else talking about a topic of relevance and importance to both parties involved. It requires that the Attender (interviewer) be interested in the topic and be willing to provide verbal and nonverbal feedback in a way that assists the other person in telling his or her story. It is a most genuine kind of empathy: focused on the other person's ideas, helping him or her communicate them.

The microtraining paradigm (Ivey, 1971), which includes attending skills training, has since proven to be highly successful and adaptable. When incorporated into a cooperative learning group format, a microtraining approach to attending skills makes it possible to teach these essential strategies of English conversation to even false-beginner level second language learners (see Acton, 1984).

Acton (1984) reported on an initial attempt to develop such a framework, without reference to a more formal, cooperative learning model. In that process, many of the techniques, adapted from microtraining systems (Ivey & Authier, 1978; Ivey & Gluckstern, 1974) were tested and expanded. That approach (Acton & Cope, 1978; Acton, 1984) was, at least in spirit, cooperative. The group format used in that system of attending skills training (Acton, 1984) provided a good basis for other tasks and projects, of

course, but at the time (the early 1980s) the value of cooperative grouping was not generally recognized.

Times have changed. Group work and group learning in the cooperative paradigm are now widely accepted in North America, Europe, and elsewhere (see McGuire, 1992). For instructors and students accustomed to cooperative group processes what follows not only will be easy to understand but should also reveal the simplicity and genius of Ivey's early work.

The Problem: Learning to Converse in a Second Language

Working with native speakers of English, attempting to help them become better Attenders, is difficult enough. Emotional and personality barriers to effective listening and responding to another in conversation can be insurmountable for some (Guiora, 1972). With second language learners, not only are there those issues to contend with, there are also important cultural differences in attending style and function (Ivey, Bradford-Ivey, & Simetz-Morgan, 1995)—in addition to language-specific vocabulary and structures—which must be addressed.

Learning how to converse, as opposed to simply speaking, should be a top priority in second language teaching methods. As any instructor who works with beginning language learners will attest, it is one thing to get them to speak English in public, that is, say words, sing songs, read texts aloud, respond to drills, do role plays; it is quite another to bring them to the point where they feel confident or daring enough to communicate outside of a fixed script or simple question-and-answer format. The CAST model is designed to put students in a situation where they not only can carry on a meaningful and interesting conversation but can also continue to learn how to attend more effectively.

Generating good conversation practice in a classroom, like the ability to listen well to others, is not a skill that many possess naturally. Conducting effective conversation practice takes preparation, some explicit understanding of the conversational conventions and pragmatics of English, an ability to manage people, and, most importantly, it requires a group process format that allows students to observe, monitor, and assist each other in meaningful and productive ways. The CAST approach to conversation teaching ensures that all members of the group actively converse and learn, a fundamental assumption of cooperative learning models.

Parameters of Cooperative Learning

To describe the CAST system and to show how consistent it is with cooperative learning frameworks, we have reordered and refocused slightly some of Johnson and Johnson's terms (the order of presentation here or in Johnson & Johnson 1994 does not imply any relative importance or hierarchy of the closely interre-

lated categories): face-to-face interaction, social skills and communication strategies, positive interdependence, group processing and management, and individual accountability.

Face-to-face Interaction: Attending

In the Ivey et al. (1968) attending training system, counselors were introduced to three deceptively simple ideas or strategies: using open-ended questions and comments, using varied eye contact, and maintaining a relaxed posture. Microtraining, by definition, entails isolating, teaching, and practicing skills. In very focused interview-like sessions, the verbal and nonverbal attending responses can be taught and refined. In that sense, a native English speaking counselor-trainee could effectively practice the three skills or behaviors of attending (verbal following, appropriate eye patterning, and relaxed posture) with other counselor trainees.

Trainees may observe videotaped models or get various kinds of feedback on their performance, looking particularly at those junctures where the topic of conversation may have gotten sidetracked and trying to decide what they should have said instead. In other words, with native speakers, especially counselors-in-training, the basic process is learning how to select and concentrate on the most effective phrase or nonverbal behavior. Within a few hours, most native speakers of the language are able to demonstrate improved control of verbal following, and satisfactory eye contact patterns, and stay reasonably relaxed in doing it.

Social Skills and Communication Strategies

As suggested earlier, in English language teaching methodology there are many techniques aimed at helping learners acquire the vocabulary and strategies of attending in English (e.g., Savignon, 1976; Oxford, 1990; Brown, 1991; Schmidt, 1992; Pica, 1994).

The description that follows of the strategies of attending (as used in CAST) is not designed to be an exhaustive description of how we attend in English. It is a learner-tailored framework that can help students remember useful expressions and improve their skill of attending (see Bialystok, 1990). Recall that attending, as conceptualized in CAST, is not a conversational role based on turntaking (see Wiemann & Knapp, 1975), but rather a posture that we sometimes assume during conversation to consciously assist another person in telling a good story.

Teaching these strategies to second language learners can be approached either deductively or inductively. It does not seem to matter which way it is done, as long as learners ultimately experience attending both as focused, explicit learning of effective phrases and a higher-level discovery of strategies. In a more explicit, deductive method, Attenders might initially be instructed to try to use one or more structures only, such as wh- questions to keep a conversation going. At a more

functional level, learners can be instructed to focus on asking for clarification or elaboration as much as possible. The same thing can also be accomplished more inductively by getting learners to try to keep their conversation partner talking any way they can, verbal or nonverbal. Then, after the fact, various techniques (elaborated below) can be used to focus on what worked and what didn't.

The basic CAST strategies are best understood by students as consisting of three categories: structures, functions, and nonverbal behaviors (eye contact and posture).

Verbal following strategies: Structures. In conversation, any one of the following structures (or others, of course) may evoke or require a long answer from the other person (the preliminary definition of effective attending given by Ivey and used in CAST). With less proficient students, however, intonation and wh- question-based responses are not only easier but will almost always get more out of the other person. (See the Appendix for a model CAST curriculum.) The verbal following structures/categories and some examples of each are listed below in terms of general effectiveness and ease of application in teaching.

A. Intonation: Questions repeating a word from the Talker's last turn, and probably mapping on rising intonation.

B. Wh- questions
   What . . . ?
   Where . . . ?
   When . . . ?

C. Short statements
   That's interesting.
   I see.
   Oh, I didn't know that.

D. Commands
   Tell me about . . .
   Go on, please.
   Give me your thoughts on . . .

E. Yes/no questions
   Did you have fun?
   Did you like it?

Those five forms or at least their labels can be taught explicitly if necessary. In general, we would assume that by the time students are ready to work with the CAST system they would have at least been introduced to that metalanguage and have some basic, productive control over those grammatical categories.

(Note: In the initial phases of training, yes/no questions should be somewhat discouraged. If at the beginning learners rely heavily on asking such questions, it either allows the other person too easy an answer—perhaps only one word—or it requires a possibly overly complex answer following the simple *yes* or *no*.)

Verbal following strategies: Functions. In the CAST framework there are three verbal following functions: continuance, clarification, and elaboration. At the outset the first two functions, continuance and clarification are emphasized more than the third (elaboration) because any time we, as Attender, ask someone to elaborate, we may well be changing the focus of the story in a way that the other person had not intended or linguistically is not able to sustain. When we analyze breakdowns in attending in ESL classes, a frequent cause is attempted elaboration or shifting of a topic.

In the listing below each of the three basic functions is broken down into three or four subcategories with some examples for each. The subcategories are of little value except to more advanced students in CAST work, but they do provide a useful framework for those instructors less familiar with discourse and conversational analysis terms. (The basic framework is taken from Acton, 1984.)

A. Continuance: Just keeping the topic going, trying to keep the other person on track while not usurping control of the conversation):

1. Minimal encouragers
   I see.
   Uh-huh.
   Go on.
   Yeah.
   And then . . .
   Tell me more.
2. Empathy/ mind reading/small world
   I know just what you mean.
   That must have been . . .
   That sounds exciting.
3. Concord/agreement/understanding
   I thought so.
   You can say that again.
   I can see why.
   You bet!
4. Surprise/shock/disbelief
   Are you kidding?
   Good grief!
   That's impossible!

B. Clarification (related to lack of understanding)
   1. Clarification of utterance, turn, or element
      Huh? I don't follow you.
      What do you mean?
      Pardon me.
   2. Topic repair
      Where were we?
      Before you said that . . .
      I'm not following that.
   3. Summary or paraphrase
      So it was . . .
      Are you saying . . .
      In other words . . .

C. Elaboration (participating actively in the development of the topic)
   1. Opinion/impression
      Are they all like that?
      I hear she is . . .
      What do you think of that?
      How did that happen?
   2. Prediction/inference
      What would happen if . . .
      What did you expect?
   3. Probing/looking for specifics
      In what way?
      What happened next?
      How did X happen?
   4. Justification/challenge
      Do you really think that . . .
      How come?
      Prove it.
      You said X, but Y.
      Where did you get that?

Eye contact and relaxed posture. Of the two nonverbal components of Ivey's framework, relaxed posture is generally achievable with any group. Regardless how large the group—and CAST can be done effectively in classes of fifty students or more—posture is easy for the instructor to monitor from anywhere in the room. As each group is conducting its conversation, there should be at least one person (the one telling the story) whose responsibility is to look and stay relaxed.

In CAST groups of ESL learners, however, in part because of the number of tasks being carried out simultaneously and the short duration of the actual conversations, *and in deference to the different cultural norms of students,* eye contact is not normally discussed or evaluated unless something problematic arises. In CAST work, students are generally not encouraged to comment on the nonverbal behavior (other than certain observations relating to relaxed posture) of other students. The instructor may, on occasion, however, find it necessary to comment to the class as a whole on nonverbal concerns, other than relaxed posture.

Positive Interdependence: CAST Roles

Whil Ivey's basic training setting is a counseling room with a counselor-in-training and a client, the CAST system is a relatively straightforward cooperative learning group process. In CAST there are ideally four to six distinct, yet interdependent, roles: Talker, Attender, one or two Observers, and one Chief. (Some of these roles can be combined.) The actual group work entails a series of short cooperative conversations of four to five minutes followed by a 10 to 15 minute discussion/analysis of those conversations, first by the group itself and then in an instructor-centered full-class discussion. The roles and responsibilities are as follows:

Talker. The Talker's basic responsibilities are (a) to provide a good topic (see discussion of topic criteria below) and (b) to stay relaxed. Because the conversation will rarely last longer than four to five minutes, the Talker must not talk nonstop. (In most cases, that is not a problem!) The reason for that is that the primary focus of CAST work is on what the Attender does (see next role below)—not the content of what the Talker is saying. In other words, a relatively short conversation can provide an adequate number of opportunities for the Talker to get across a good story and for the other roles to participate appropriately.

In addition to staying relaxed, another responsibility of the Talker is to attempt to speak in rhythm groups, or phrasal groups. This has several potential benefits: (a) it allows the Attender and others sufficient processing time to grasp what is being said; (b) it provides the Attender more opportunities to comment or ask appropriate questions and use back-channeling devices (e.g., *uh-huh, I see, oh, hmmm*), and (c) it affords the Talker more time to think of what to say next. Finally, (d) this style of speaking English in controlled situations, in rhythm or phrasal groups, is a well-established technique in contemporary pronunciation teaching (see Gilbert, 1995; Grant, 1994).

Attender. Despite the fact that research in several disciplines has established that the concept of attending is culturally universal (although the specific behaviors may differ greatly by culture), assuming the role of Attender can be difficult for many. Ivey and Gluckstern (1974, p. 2) noted that, "Very few people in our society are effective listeners; it seems sad that we must teach people to

listen, but it is a necessary skill which our culture has not taught many of us." What Ivey and associates have ably demonstrated over the years is that not only can anyone become a better Attender, but that even a small amount of improvement in attending skill can have immediate, even dramatic, results.

The Attender's role is to help the Talker create a good story. That is done by staying with the Talker's topic and train of thought, using short responses, and not interrupting except for necessary clarification or explanation. It is amazing how well even low-level ESL students can function in conversation once they have learned key attending strategies and have internalized the rhythm of a few key English-style turn taking conventions.

Observer-1. The primary responsibility of Observer-1 is to write down expressions used by the Attender that resulted in effective attending, defined as forcing longer, more interesting responses by the Talker. Here the "game" of CAST is most focused. Whereas the Talkers do their best to respond in relatively short utterances or turns, the Attenders, likewise, do their utmost to come up with comments or questions that will require longer, more elaborate responses from the Talker. Observer-1 is instructed to try to ignore the content of what the Talker is saying, and only to note whether the Talker was forced into something more than a one-word answer and then write down what it was the Attender said that set that up. Some questions can, indeed, be answered with one word, but the Talker is instructed not to be unduly evasive.

It is the very notion of cooperation here that soon motivates the group. The idea is to work together to tell a good story, one that is a model of cooperative dialogue in which the Attender makes a contribution as audience, helping to focus and develop the narrative. With lower-proficiency level classes, it may be necessary to have two people handling the job of Observer-1. Once the conversation is concluded, Observers report their "data" either to the Chief of their group (see "Chief" role described below) or to the instructor, depending on the ability or proficiency of students.

Observer-2. Observer-2's role will vary depending on language proficiency and class size. As noted in "Observer-1" above, it may be useful to have two Observers focusing their attention on the speech of the Attender. Observer-2 could also, if necessary, give the Attender some help in coming up with responses to the Talker's contributions. With intermediate-level classes, Observer-2 could also take notes on aspects of the speech of the Talker, such as the number of rhythm groups per turn, or the length of rhythm groups, or possibly aspects of topic development. During the post conversation discussion period, an Observer-2 could, alternatively, be asked to summarize briefly the story or to comment on specifics of form such as pauses or sentence length.

Observer-3. Observer-3 can function as Observer of the Attender, Observer of the Talker, or as an Attender's assistant.

Chief. The group Chief can have several jobs: time keeper, message person, recorder, and manager. Since everyone except the Chief may change jobs after each post-conversation discussion, he or she also must keep track of who has had which role during the session. Typically, one conversation/discussion requires about 20 minutes. If there are only three or four students (the minimum), the Chief may have to do double duty as Talker, Attender, Observer-1 or Observer-2.

Group Processing and Management

The CAST framework is based on a series of 20-minute rounds. A round is composed of a brief (3 to 5 minute) conversation, followed by a discussion of about 15 minutes. In a 50-minute class, for example, two rounds can be done easily. At the beginning, a 3-minute conversation is adequate. To start a round, the Talker might say something like, "Let me tell you about X." While the Talker and Attender work on telling the story, the Observers note effective attending. Even with more advanced students, the conversations should go no longer than 4 to 5 minutes. As students' skills improve and as they begin to offer more interesting topics it becomes more and more difficult to stop those conversations!

There are a number of ways a round may be started. In addition to the "Let me tell you about . . . " frame, the Talker could say something like, "Have you heard that . . . " or simply "I have X" or "I did X." The round can also be initiated by the Attender with "Tell me about . . . " In that case, the Talker would have told the Attender in advance what the topic is. (See below for further discussion of the nature of the topics used in the rounds.)

Once the round begins and the Talker is talking, the Attender is attending, the Observers are either taking notes or helping out, and the Chief is keeping track of the time, the instructor should walk around from group to group helping out where necessary and taking mental (or written) notes on effective and problematic behaviors. When the round is over (in 3 to 5 minutes), the instructor then returns to the blackboard and conducts the follow up.

In the 15-minute follow-up to the round, a number of things can take place, again depending on the level of the class. Ideally, the group itself should first quickly review the Observer's notes on effective expressions. In a 3-minute round an Observer may write down as many as a dozen expressions that are considered at the time to be effective attending. The Chief or an Observer passes on this data to the instructor by reading the note aloud or passing it on in written form. Alternatively, the instructor can go to each Observer, group-by-group, and ask for exact-word examples of effective attending. After an Observer (or Chief) presents an example to the class, the instructor can respond in a number of ways:

1) Write the example on the board as given and then repair it as necessary. That repair may include grammar or an alternate way of expressing the same idea.
2) In the case where that example has been given previously by an earlier group or during an earlier round, the instructor can request a new example, or provide a new token that would accomplish the same purpose.
3) Write the example as given and then ask the group for an alternate way of saying the same thing, of expressing the same meaning.
4) Classify or comment on the strategy used. (In later rounds, it can be effective for the strategy to be identified either by the student or instructor.)
5) Ask the Observer what the Talker said or did in response to the Attender's comment or question.
6) Request that the example provided by the Observer be either expanded to sentence length or reduced down from sentence length to conversational length, that is, given as one or two words. (For the Japanese Attender, who by training will try to form every question in perfect grammar, just the order to use no complete sentences can be very effective and liberating.)
7) Request exact words used. It is difficult even for native speakers to get accustomed to listening for the exact words of the Attender.
8) Set up the next round. In addition to reminding the Chief who should be Talker, Attender, and Observers for the next round, the instructor may offer general comments on any aspect of the round, including nonverbal behavior of any one involved. The instructor may also provide the Attenders with a target strategy for the next round. For example, Attenders may be instructed to attempt more responses that are basically repetitions of a word or phrase from the Talker's speech—with rising intonation added.
9) Build up a database of expressions used that the students should practice. That corpus can then later be presented in various formats.

Individual Accountability: Student Evaluation

As in any cooperative system, student learning and achievement can be assessed in a number of ways. The very nature of the CAST groups makes the performance of every member quite transparent throughout the process. For example, each member must prepare topics for the day's session, take notes of effective attending (as Observer), and demonstrate understanding of attending strategies in interacting with the Talker. Just by collecting the topic list assigned as homework and checking over the notes that students take during the session, it will be very clear who is studying and learning—and who is not.

There are several methods for testing competence and improvement in attending. Perhaps the most effective, if time permits, is to observe each student

in each role. That can be done by having two students attend in a more isolated test setting. It is relatively easy to devise a checklist rating system for that purpose. If that type of evaluation is not feasible (possibly due to time constraints), students can be tested somewhat more indirectly by having them listen to attending and then respond to questions of various kinds, or by being required to write dialogues that demonstrate their understanding of good attending. Alternatively, cloze-like passages can be created to require students to fill in the blanks with attending expressions or probable responses.

An essay on attending is a good vehicle for assessing understanding of the principles involved and for getting students to focus on the interpersonal aspects of being an Attender. The essay assignment could be something like: Describe someone in your experience who is a great Attender. Here are a few phrases from one class (Acton, 1984, p. 33):

did not talk much	is gentle
concentrates on me	shows agreement often
develop topic together	encouraging questions
listens to me	we forget about the time
looks like me	we have a close relationship
knows when to stop talking	is honest

Mothers, fathers, friends, grandparents, and significant others are often seen as great Attenders; the essays are almost always touching and very sincere.

Topic Preparation and Selection

The choice of topic, as stated earlier, is crucial to the success of attending training. Students are told that any topic they choose must have three characteristics. It must be secret, specific, and interesting. "Secret" means that only the Talker knows about it. It must be new information, at least to the Attender. Two students in the same class can use a similar topic as long as they are not members of the same group that day. The characteristic "specific" is more problematic. The best topics are usually events, or people. General topics such as places or "ideas" can be more difficult for the Attender to deal with. To ensure that topics are appropriate, students are told to come to class with a list of five possible topics for their attending session for that day. They will need at least one good topic. (Topics are generally noted just simply as phrases or words, not as complete sentences—see suggestive list below.)

Before the attending rounds begin, the instructor checks every student's list for acceptable, interesting topics. If none of the topics prepared as homework are appropriate, the student either is given suggestions as to how to sharpen the topics or is assisted by the group or the instructor in coming up with the re-

quired topics. The instructor may comment to the class about good topics students will be using that day, or may suggest other topics to the class to give students more possibilities for later. In addition, it may be helpful to give students a list of good topics for them to study as homework. In practice, it sometimes takes three or four sessions before students are consistently coming up with acceptable topics.

As mentioned earlier, in working with Japanese students, topic-selection training was at first difficult. They all seemed to have seen the same movies, read the same books, gone to the same places. With persistent, patient monitoring of their proposed topics by the instructor, they gradually began to focus on "personal" events such as accidents or parties or vacations or unusual people they knew. From that point on, the quality of conversations improved. Here are a few examples of some of the more stimulating topics from a recent CAST 8-week curriculum (a total of about 8 hours, roughly one hour per week).

My dog's adventure
My stupid dog's adventure
A strange lady (when I was 10 years old)
Our basketball team
My first love
I was hit by a car.
My father was mistaken robber. [sic]
My friend tricked on me. [sic]
My song
Day and night mixed up
Losing a lot of blood
My hometown [a strange place]
About Sanbongo's [where she lives]
Snake information
Sunburnt
My brother's car repair
Goodbye, my girlfriend!
My eyebrow
Speed over [sic]
My dog (he dead) [sic]
Drinking party
Attempt to be in a diet [sic]
Welcome, new baby!
Cream soda [a great story, in fact!]
On my way back to my home
Funny teacher in a high school

My brother had traffic accident and almost drowned in the sea in same day. [sic]
One of my high school's festivals

These are the kind of topics that naturally generate interest. With a little forethought, any student can come up with at least one or two effective stories per week. The key to successfully developing consistently good topics—and attending—is to work with students closely on the topic they will introduce. The time required in checking every topic for a session and in insuring that every student has an engaging and interesting topic is worth the effort. Students (and teachers) inevitably discover that there are some very interesting people in the class who have done many interesting things.

Conclusion

If it is necessary to convince students or colleagues of the value of being a good Attender, begin with this set of observations from Acton (1984, p. 22) based on Ivey & Authier (1978):

> Attending gives important feedback to the other person as to how the message is being received. Attending indicates that the listener is interested in what is being said. Attending is very reinforcing to the other person. It makes him or her feel good and feel more like talking. Attending enables one to get more information as well as more accurate information, both by learning to listen carefully and by being able to get experts to talk at length about their areas of expertise. Ultimately (and ironically) attending skills should help the language learners get more practice speaking [cf. Kleinemann, 1983]—because people will just enjoy talking with them!

The CAST framework makes attending training possible and potentially very effective with second language learners. Class size is almost irrelevant; language proficiency is not much of an issue either. Attending is a great survival tool for language learners. Once students learn it, most can keep almost anybody talking about almost anything.

One might think that for ESL beginners, especially, just being able to attend, to keep somebody talking, would be a skill that when employed could easily come off as being artificial, mechanical, or manipulative. It may, of course. But recall that in CAST, effective attending is always tied to topic. Without first-class topics at the ready, the class session cannot even begin. It also becomes evident to everyone that there can be no real communication without genuine interest and that faking it can be much more problematic than saying nothing. In the context of CAST lessons, to attend without caring or to pretend to attend to a

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boring story, is almost unthinkable and should not be allowed to happen in the first place. We can only hope that an understanding that good conversation depends on good intent carries beyond the classroom. To paraphrase H.L. Mencken: There are no *bad* stories, only boring ones.

A cooperative group at its best assumes relationships among members based on trust and caring. Those relationships come about, in part, because students have learned how to work well together as a team. The team spirit develops best when the group is able to successfully complete a well-conceived, challenging project.

In CAST, what starts out as a relatively controlled, skill-focused exercise gradually evolves into a meaningful, rewarding, and quite profitable group experience. Since students are required from the outset to talk with teammates about topics that are not only inherently interesting but personal as well, relationships based on understanding and genuine sharing are engendered. They get to know each other first as people with interesting stories to tell; and in the process, they learn how to better converse in English. It is something that every cooperative learning group ought to attend to.

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Appendix

Model Cooperative Attending Skills Training Curriculum

Hour 1 - *Introduction to Attending; practice selecting good topics*

A. Model attending with students. (Instructor as Talker or Attender, student or students as Attender or Talker, depending on the general level of the class.) It is often a good idea to audiotape this initial interaction so it can be replayed and analyzed as you point out appropriate examples.
B. Write effective attending expressions on the board or flipchart. Perhaps add to the list a few other examples that function in the same way.
C. Do one or more additional "class-centered" rounds, citing more examples. (Have students copy the examples in their notebooks, etc.)
D. Homework assignment: Bring 5 good "Talker/attending" topics to next class

Hour 2 - *Introduction to the cooperative group responsibilities*

A. Check topic homework carefully, noting with each student the two most appropriate for the day's work.
B. Outline roles on the board in very simple terms.
C. Do another model round (perhaps, with half of class as Attender, half of class as Observer, and instructor as Talker).
D. Assign groups.
E. Do 2 or 3 initial rounds (possibly using rising intonation on one of the final elements of Talker's sentences as a single attending strategy focus.)
F. Homework: topics.

Hours 3 - 6 - *CAST rounds*

A. Check topics (identifying the two best).
B. Assign groups.
C. Do 3-4 rounds.
D. Homework: topics and (possibly) some attending practice with friends or family. (Even discussions or essays based on attending done in the students' native languages can be fruitful.)

Hours 7 and 8 - *Focus on CAST strategies*

After each round, identify the strategies used. (For other instructor options, see above.)